ENG 614: Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory
Tentative Schedule of Readings

1. The Linguistic Paradigm

2. The Event of Deconstruction

3. Marxism, Culture, and the Question of Ideology

4. Ethical Provocations, Bio-Politicizations
17 May: Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” “What is Enlightenment?”
“On the Genealogy of Ethics,” “The Birth of Biopolitics,” “Subjectivity and
Sacred.” Giorgio Agamben, “Introduction” to Homo Sacer, “The

5. Two Strains of the Affective Turn: Late Barthes, Late Deleuze
the Movie Theatre,” from Camera Lucida, “The Grain of the Voice,” “The
Image,” from A Lover’s Discourse. Rosalind Coward & John Ellis,
“Semiology as a Science of Signs.” Mary Bittner Wiseman, “Make-up, Masks,
Cameras, and Chromosomes.” Steven Ungar, “The Professor of Desire.”
31 May: Gilles Deleuze, from What is Philosophy?, “To Have Done With Judgment,”
from Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation. Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy
of Affect.” John Rajchman, from The Deleuze Connections: “Life,”
“Sensations.” Steve Shaviro, from The Cinematic Body: “Deleuze’s Theory of
Sexuality.”
Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory

This seminar is a concentrated introduction to some of the most important methodological developments in the professional study of literature and culture over the past half-century or so. I have divided the term into five units -- roughly speaking, structuralism, deconstruction, history and ideology, ethics, affect -- and I have selected what I believe to be the most significant and illuminating texts by the principal theorists from each of these rubrics. We will read and discuss essays by Benveniste, Jakobson, Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, de Man, Althusser, Adorno, R. Williams, Benjamin, Levinas, Foucault, and Deleuze. And we will also read essays by a diverse collection of some of our most important contemporary critics – often very much alive and kicking – who have commented or elaborated on the work of these theorists in order to see where these theoretical paradigms take us. It’s my hope that the seminar will not only be an introduction to the “origins” of “literary and cultural theory” but a map of at least one version of its present and some of its futures.

Assignments Students will write three two-page “close readings” of passages from the assigned texts (10% each). And students will write a critical paper (approximately 10 pages) which deploys one or more of these theoretical positions in the analysis of an agreed upon literary or cultural document (60%). And, finally, because the quality of discussion is so crucial to the success of the seminar, 10% of the course grade will be based on the quality of contributions to the discussions. The two-page papers are due on the Monday before the seminar. A complete draft of the critical paper is due May 27th. Final versions are due June 10th.

Texts All assigned texts will be made available on the ENG 614 Blackboard site.